

## The Battle of Pea Ridge

Edwin C. Bearss

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

---

### Recommended Citation

Bearss, Edwin C. "The Battle of Pea Ridge." *The Annals of Iowa* 37 (1963), 9-41.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.7677>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

## The Battle of Pea Ridge

BY EDWIN C. BEARSS

RESEARCH HISTORIAN, VICKSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

### *Part II*

*Continued from the Spring, 1963 Issue*

When General Curtis dismissed his staff meeting, the officers prepared to rejoin their commands. As he was starting to mount, Curtis called to Colonel Carr that he should "clear out that hollow [cross Timber] in a very short time."<sup>54</sup>

When he awoke on the morning of March 7, Colonel Dodge was deeply troubled. What he had seen during the night had convinced him that the Confederates were about to strike the Army of the Southwest a powerful blow from an unexpected direction—the Federal's right or rear. Orders were issued by Dodge for the troops of the brigade to break camp and follow him to army headquarters.

By the time that Major Weston rode up with the bad news that the Rebels were advancing up Cross Timber Hollow and driving in his pickets, Dodge's troops had reached Pratt's Store. Stepping to the door of Asboth's tent, Curtis saw a column halted on the road. Turning around, he asked, to whose command do those troops belong?

Dodge said, "Mine."

As a result of Dodge's foresight, valuable time would be saved. Carr would not have to send an aide to Little Sugar Creek for one of his two brigades. Placing himself at the head of the column, Carr told Dodge to march his brigade up the Telegraph road. Before Dodge's infantry and artillery reached Elkhorn, the brigade was reinforced by the 3d Illinois Cavalry.<sup>55</sup>

Elkhorn Tavern was about a mile north of Pratt's Store. Between the store and the tavern the land rose gradually. West of the Telegraph road were several large corn fields,

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 258-259.

<sup>55</sup> Dodge, "Personal Biography," I, 49-52.

east of it was one long narrow field (Samuel Ruddick's) and a smaller one. These fields extended to within one-half mile of Elkhorn Tavern. Southwest of the junction of the Telegraph and the Bentonville-Sugar Creek roads was a large wood lot. South of the Huntsville road and east of the Telegraph road was a thick belt of timber. Elkhorn Tavern stood on the west side of the Telegraph road, near the head of Cross Timber Hollow. Behind the tavern rose the rocky southeastern nose of Pea Ridge. In front of the tavern was a level ridge, along which ran the Huntsville road. About one-half mile east of the tavern on the north side of the Huntsville road was Clemens' house. Opposite Clemens' house on the south side of the road was a fenced field, containing about 20 acres.

Carr and Dodge arrived at Elkhorn Tavern just as Price was extending his left to block the Huntsville road. Unless this movement could be promptly checked, the Rebels would envelop the Union position centering on the tavern.<sup>56</sup>

Calling to Major John McConnell of the 3d Illinois Cavalry, Carr told him to rush to the support of Major Weston's hard-pressed troops. Weston's line was on the verge of collapsing in the face of Price's advance. McConnell's 2d Battalion was to be posted west of the Telegraph road. Dodge's footsoldiers, supported by Lieutenant Virgil J. David's section of the 1st Iowa Battery, were to follow the cavalry down the Huntsville road.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 259, 263.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 259, 263, 265. A resident of Dubuque, David had been commissioned Senior 1st Lieutenant in the 1st Iowa Battery on August 17, 1861.

*Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, V, 1705. The 1st Battery, Iowa Light Artillery was recruited under the authority contained in President Lincoln's May 3 call for 42,034 volunteers to serve for three years. Acting in accordance with the President's proclamation, Governor Kirkwood called for the enlistment of a company of artillery to be designated as the 1st Battery, Iowa Light Artillery.

The men who were to constitute the the 1st Iowa Battery were recruited in eastern Iowa. In addition, about 40 of the personnel came from western Illinois. On July 26, Governor Kirkwood was notified that the artillery company had been organized. At this, the governor ordered the unit into quarters at Burlington. The company, 116 strong, was mustered into Federal service on August 17 by Captain Alexander Chambers.

As Dodge approached the Clemens' house at the head of his infantry, he saw a large number of Confederate skirmishers suddenly emerge from the timber a short distance beyond. The 4th Iowa and McConnell's two battalions of the 3d Illinois Cavalry advanced to meet the butternuts. Without a moment's hesitation, Colonel Dodge shouted for David's cannoneers to unlimber their two pieces. David's gunners unlimbered their two guns on the Huntsville road near the northeast corner of Clemens' field. Almost as soon as the trails struck the ground, the Iowans began to rake the Confederates (Cearnal's dismounted troopers) who had just debouched from Williams Hollow with a storm of shot and shell.

Unable to hold their ground, the Missourians retired into the woods. This brief respite gave Dodge time to complete his dispositions. The two battalions of Illinois cavalymen were dismounted and deployed to the right, the 35th Illinois to the left, while the 4th Iowa was used to cover David's guns. A company of the rugged Hawk-eyes was thrown forward as skirmishers. Advancing into the heavy timber and underbrush north of the Huntsville road, the Iowans drove Cearnal's Missourians back into Williams Hollow. Price's first attempt to outflank Carr had failed.

Captain Charles H. Fletcher was the first commander of the battery. Fletcher, who had attended the U. S. Military Academy, held a commission in the regular army. According to one of the enlisted men, "we had the benefit of a thorough Drill Master, and were put through the evolutions of drill with lively industry."

Camp Fletcher, as the artillerists named their cantonment, "was a fine location for a military camp, in a sanitary sense and for comfort, and was easily kept in a wholesome condition." Since Fletcher liked a clean camp, the soldiers spent many hours policing the area.

Early in December orders were received by Captain Fletcher to, "Proceed without delay with your company to Jefferson Barracks, on the boat of the Keokuk Packet Company."

Debarking at St. Louis, the Iowans were stationed at Benton Barracks until the third week in January. While at Benton Barracks, the battery received its armament (four 6-pounder guns and two 12-pounder howitzers), caissons, limbers, and forge. On January 8, Captain Fletcher was ordered to rejoin his regiment—the 1st U. S. Infantry. Consequently, he had to resign his commission in the 1st Iowa Battery. The senior 1st Lieutenant became the acting battery commander. Shortly thereafter, the 1st Iowa Battery was shifted to Rolla, where the unit joined Curtis' army. *Ibid.*, 1691.

Following the arrival of Dodge's bluecoats on the field, Major Weston recalled and regrouped the soldiers of the 24th Missouri. Weston then redeployed his soldiers on Carr's left between Elkhorn Tavern and Pea Ridge.<sup>58</sup>

In the meantime, Lieutenant Orrin W. Gambell's section of the 1st Iowa Battery rumbled past the tavern.<sup>59</sup> Colonel Carr accompanied the gunners on their wild ride up the Telegraph road. When Carr gave the word, the drivers reined in their teams. The Iowans unlimbered their two guns on the right of the Telegraph road about 400 yards north of the hotel. From this point, the gunners were able to command the Telegraph road as it ascended Cross Timber Hollow.

Captain Junius A. Jones, accompanied by Lieutenant James M. Williams' section, started to follow David's guns down the Huntsville road.<sup>60</sup> Just as Williams' cannoneers were getting ready to place their pieces in battery, a messenger rode up and told Captain Jones that David's section had pushed farther out along the Huntsville road.

At this, Jones shouted for Williams' men to limber up their guns. The captain determined to reinforce Gambell's section. By the time Williams' guns turned into the Telegraph road, Gambell's section had roared into action. Thundering up the Telegraph road, Williams' artilleryists threw their two pieces into battery on Gambell's right. Colonel Carr massed the 35th Illinois in support of Gambell's and Williams' sections.<sup>61</sup>

Colonel Carr quickly observed that the Confederates were present in great strength. He sent a member of his staff to ask Curtis to send him his 2d brigade, Colonel William Vandever's. Curtis wasted no time in honoring

<sup>58</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 259, 263, 265.

<sup>59</sup> Gambell, who hailed from Monmouth, Illinois, had been appointed Junior 1st Lieutenant in the battery on August 17, 1861. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, V, 1708.

<sup>60</sup> A resident of Frensbury, New York, Jones had joined the battery as Senior 2nd Lieutenant on August 17, 1861. Jones had been commissioned captain on January 18, 1862. *Ibid.*, 1711. Williams, who called Monmouth, Illinois, his home, had enlisted in the battery as 4th Sergeant on August 17, 1861. He was commissioned a 2d lieutenant on January 18, 1862. *Ibid.*, 1721.

<sup>61</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 265.

Carr's request. Marching orders were immediately issued to Vandever's command.<sup>62</sup>

Since Vandever's men had remained behind to help hold the Little Sugar Creek line, it would be some time before they reached Carr. All this time, the fighting in the Elkhorn Tavern area continued to wax and wain. The four guns of Gambell's and Williams' sections were engaged in a fierce duel with four Confederate batteries (Clark's, Tull's, Wade's and the St. Louis). Captain Jones pronounced the Rebels' fire "galling in the extreme."

Just as one of the guns in Williams' section was getting off its second round, the No. 3 man (Reese Parkhurst) "was killed, a cannon-ball taking off his left leg and a piece of rock striking him in his head."<sup>63</sup>

At this, Captain Jones bellowed out the command, fix prolonges! If it became necessary, Jones was prepared to retire his guns firing. A shell from one of the Confederate guns now scored a direct hit on one of the Iowans' caissons, exploding it. A team hitched to a second caisson bolted, when a runaway team collided with it. The horses raced down the slope, the caisson tipped over, breaking the pole and scattering the ammunition chests. Subsequently, Lieutenant David's section recovered two of the horses and several of the chests. One of the guns was disabled when a cartridge jammed in the bore; it had to be sent to the rear.

Having found the range, the Confederates sent round after round of shot and shell crashing into the area defended by Jones' three remaining guns:

Kirk W. Henry was disabled by a piece of shell striking him in the mouth; Sergt. H. R. Horr was severely hurt by a spent round shot striking him in the groin; W. F. Conner was slightly wounded in the hand; D. J. Duvall was struck over the eye with a piece of shell, disabling him for a time; Thomas Brown was injured by a piece of shell, wounding him in the right side; I. B. Nelson was wounded in the right hand and back; Clark Woodmansee was

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 259. Vandever, who called Dubuque his home, had been appointed colonel of the 9th Iowa Infantry on August 30, 1861. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, II, 11.

<sup>63</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 265. A resident of Agency, Private Parkhurst had enlisted in the battery on August 17, 1861. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, V, 1715.

wounded in the right shoulder by a grazing ball; Samuel Black was wounded slightly in the ankle by a grazing solid shot; James Molesworth was disabled by a spent round shot striking him in the hip, and John Easton, detailed from Company [F], Fourth Iowa, was wounded in the right arm slightly by a grape shot.<sup>64</sup>

The Confederates registered a direct hit on a second caisson, blowing it up. In the explosion, the driver of the wheel team, Edward Skivinski was badly burned. Lieutenant Gambell was cut down, a canister ball passing through his left leg above the knee. Realizing that it would be suicidal for his men to remain where they were a minute longer, Captain Jones shouted for the battery to fall back firing. In addition, the gun captains had reported they were running short of ammunition. Just as the second piece was turning into the Telegraph road, the captain was struck by a spent round shot in the left thigh. Unable to set his horses, Jones retired from the field. As he did so, Corporal William R. Leebert's gun started for the rear.<sup>65</sup>

Colonel Carr had maintained his command post at the point where Gambell's and Williams' sections had placed their guns. Carr reported:

Captain Jones and Lieutenant Gambell were wounded by my side, and all but one of the pieces were disabled. This one piece was commanded by Corporal Leebert . . . and was the only gun which was in the action from beginning to end, and both Corporal Leebert and his cannoneers deserve great credit for coolness, gallantry, and activity through the entire action.<sup>66</sup>

The soldiers of the 35th Illinois, who were posted in support of Gambell's and Williams' sections, held their

<sup>64</sup> Five of the wounded men (Henry, Conner, Duvall, Woodmansee, and Black), hailed from Illinois. Sergeant Horr was from Dubuque, Private Brown from Morning Sun, Private Nelson from Mount Pleasant, and Private Molesworth from Columbia. Four of the men (Henry, Brown, Nelson, and Molesworth) had enlisted in the battery on September 1, 1861, the others had joined on August 17. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, V, 1702, 1704, 1705, 1709, 1710, 1714, 1722. Private John A. Easton of Madison County had enlisted in Company F, 4th Iowa, on July 1, 1861. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, I, 576; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 265.

<sup>65</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 259, 263, 265; Samuel Black, *A Soldier's Recollections of the Civil War* (Minco, 1911-1912), 6-8. A resident of Rising Sun, Skivinski had enlisted in the battery on September 1, 1861. Leebert, who came from Strawberry Point, had joined the battery as a private on August 17, 1861. He had been made 4th Corporal on October 1 and 3d Corporal on February 24. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, V, 1711, 1718.

<sup>66</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 259.

ground without flinching during the bombardment. Among the many casualties in the regiment was Colonel Gustavus A. Smith. He was struck in the head by a shell fragment, which tore off part of his scalp.<sup>67</sup>

About this time, General Curtis rode up. He wanted to see how things were going with Colonel Carr's command. It was quickly apparent to the general that the Rebels were softening up Carr's position with their artillery, preparatory to launching an all out attack. Curtis sent one of his aides to order Colonel Davis to march his division to Carr's assistance. Before Davis could carry out these instructions, "Task Force Osterhaus" was assailed by McCulloch's column. Curtis considered this threat so grave that he cancelled his order directing Davis to hasten to Elkhorn Tavern. Instead, Davis was directed to aid Osterhaus north of Leetown.<sup>68</sup>

It was early afternoon before the leading elements of Vandever's brigade reached the tavern. The 3d Battery, Iowa Light Artillery marched at the head of the column. Observing that the cannoneers of the 1st Iowa Battery were taking a fearful pounding, Colonel Vandever told Captain Mortimer M. Hayden to advance one of his sections to their support. Hayden told Lieutenant Melville C. Wright to go to the assistance of the 1st Iowa.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 199, 259.

<sup>69</sup> A resident of Dubuque, Hayden had been commissioned captain and placed in command of the 3d Iowa Battery on August 8, 1861. Wright, whose home was Delhi, had been appointed a Junior 1st Lieutenant in the battery on August 8: *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, V, 1767, 1781; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 200, 259, 268. The 3d Battery, Iowa Light Artillery was organized under special authority from Secretary of War Simon Cameron at Dubuque in August and September 1861. When organized, the unit was known as the "Dubuque Battery." The battery was attached to the 9th Iowa Infantry.

On September 3, 1861, the first detachment of the battery was mustered into Federal service at Camp Union, near Dubuque. The additional enlistments necessary to complete the organization of a full six gun battery were soon secured. On September 24, the entire unit (140 strong) was mustered in.

The battery left Camp Union on September 26. After embarking on the steamer *Canada*, the artillerists were transported to St. Louis, where they landed on the 30th. Marching to Benton Barracks, the Hawkeyes went into camp. Here, the artillerists were issued their uniforms and horses were provided for the battery. A shortage of heavy ordnance and



Amid a cracking of whips and the shouts of the drivers, Wright's sections rumbled to the front. Wright's gunners threw their two pieces into position on the Telegraph road. While they were unlimbering their guns, Wright's artillerists were subjected to a scathing fire. Wright's arrival was timely, because the men of the battered 1st Iowa were abandoning this key position. Almost as soon as Wright's two guns roared into action, Corporal Leebert's gun crew withdrew their piece. It was now up to the 3rd Iowa Battery to hold at bay the Confederate force which was massed in Cross Timber Hollow.

Within a few minutes Lieutenants William H. McClure's and Jerome Bradley's sections of the 3rd Iowa Battery reached the field and went into action to the right and to the left of Wright's guns. While supervising the emplacement of the field pieces, Carr was struck by a splinter of flying shrapnel. Although this was the third and most painful wound which he received during the day, Carr refused to go to the rear.<sup>70</sup>

The arrival of Vandever's brigade enabled Carr to re-deploy his troops. Vandever was told to post his soldiers

artillery accouterments kept the battery from taking the field. Consequently, the Iowans were compelled to remain at Benton Barracks for six weeks. While there, the officers put the unit through a rigorous training program, the men learning the "rudiments of artillery drill and discipline."

November 13, found the Iowans marching from their camp and climbing aboard railroad cars. After a 35 mile ride, the artillerists detrained at Pacific City. Here, they remained until the end of January 1862. About December 1, the battery was issued its long awaited armament—four 6-pounder bronze guns and two 12-pounder howitzers.

The cannoneers spent many hours at gun drill. By the time the 3d Iowa Battery was ordered to take the field, the personnel had become very proficient in the handling of field guns. While at Pacific City, the battery was reviewed and inspected on several occasions. Each time, the inspecting officers reported the battery "was in condition to take the field and render good service."

On January 25, the battery was ordered to proceed to Rolla. After boarding the cars of the South Pacific Railroad, the Iowans were shifted to the big forward base. There, the battery was assigned to Curtis' Army of the Southwest. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, V, 1749.

<sup>70</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol VIII, 200, 259, 268. McClure, a resident of Cedar Falls, had been commissioned Senior 1st Lieutenant in the battery on August 8, 1861. Bradley, who hailed from Dubuque, had been appointed Junior 2d Lieutenant on the same date. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, V, 1750, 1760, 1770.

on Dodge's left. The 9th Iowa was rushed up the Telegraph road and formed in support of the 3rd Iowa Battery. Upon the arrival of the Hawkeyes, Lieutenant Colonel William P. Chandler (With Colonel Smith disabled, Chandler now led the 35th Illinois.) shifted the 35th Illinois to the right. A dangerous gap between the Illinois regiment and the 4th Iowa which had heretofore been covered by a few skirmishers was sealed. Colonel John E. Phelps' Missouri Regiment moved into position on the left of the 9th Iowa. Major Weston's 24th Missouri extended to the left to allow Phelps to form his men into line of battle. The left flank of Weston's regiment was anchored on the crest of Pea Ridge. Since the ground was very rugged, Weston deployed his men as skirmishers. A battalion (the 2d) of the 3d Illinois would continue to screen Carr's left flank.<sup>71</sup>

Covered by the 9th Iowa, Hayden's battery carried on

<sup>71</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol VIII, 268, 271, 273. The ten companies which were to constitute the 9th Iowa Infantry were raised under authority granted in a proclamation issued by the President on July 23, 1861. William Vandever, one of the two Iowans representing the state in the U. S. House of Representatives, was given permission to organize this regiment from his Congressional District. At the same time, Governor Kirkwood named Vandever colonel of the regiment. During the period between September 2 and 24, the various companies were mustered into Federal service at Dubuque by Captain Edward C. Washington of the U. S. Army.

On September 26, two days after the last company had been sworn in, Vandever marched his regiment to the Dubuque landing. There, the soldiers, 977 officers and enlisted men, were embarked on steamboats. Transported down the Mississippi River, the regiment landed at St. Louis. As soon as the troops had gone ashore, they were marched to Benton Barracks. There, the Iowans were issued their arms, clothing, and camp equipage.

Colonel Vandever's regiment remained at Benton Barracks until October 11, when orders were received to proceed to Franklin, Missouri. The 9th Iowa had drawn the task of guarding the South Pacific Railroad between Franklin and Rolla. To carry out this mission, Vandever was compelled to divide his regiment into detachments, which were posted at all the bridges and trestles. Regimental headquarters were at Franklin. During the three months in which the 9th Iowa performed this duty, the men "suffered greatly from exposure to the inclement winter weather, and like all new regiments, was subjected to much sickness on account of such exposure."

On January 21, 1862, Colonel Vandever was given orders to call in his detachments. As soon as this had been done, the regiment was transferred to Rolla, where Vandever reported to General Curtis. Shortly thereafter, Colonel Vandever was placed in charge of a brigade, while Lieutenant Colonel Francis J. Herron took over the regiment. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, II, 3-4.

the deadly duel which Jones' artillerists had been forced to abandon. The Confederates had increased their fire-power. A fresh battery (Guibor's) had joined Clark's Tull's, Wade's, and the St. Louis. Before very long, the Rebels gained the upper hand. Colonel Carr shouted for Hayden to pull back. Leaving a disabled limber and several dead and wounded horses, the 3d Iowa Battery fell back about 300 yards. Hayden's gunners unlimbered their pieces on a knoll in front of the tavern. Almost as soon as the trails were on the ground, the Iowans had their six guns back in action.<sup>72</sup>

When he decided not to send Davis' division to Elkhorn Tavern, Curtis called for the commander of his escort, Major William D. Bowen. The major was directed to take Lieutenant Edward Madison's section of mountain howitzers and Company C (Captain Frederick W. Benteen commanding) and report to Colonel Carr.

Reaching Elkhorn Tavern, Bowen found the Federals hard-pressed to hold their ground in the face of the terrible hammering by the Confederate artillery. In accordance with Carr's instructions, Bowen had Lieutenant Madison's gunners emplace their two 12-pounder mountain howitzers on the Telegraph road about 400 yards north of the tavern. Captain Benteen dismounted and massed his company in support of the "Jackass" battery.

Madison's section reached the front at a very opportune moment, because the fire of the Confederate guns had just compelled the 3d Iowa Battery to fall back. After his gun captains had fired 24 rounds, they informed Lieutenant Madison that their pack caissons were empty. Bowen accordingly withdrew his detachment.<sup>73</sup>

Shortly after the "Jackass" battery had retired, there was a lull in the bombardment. Taking advantage of this hiatus, Carr rode to the right to see how Dodge was doing. He found his brigade commander on the Huntsville road, near the Clemens' house. While Carr was inspecting

<sup>72</sup> O.R., Series 1, Vol. VIII, 200,259, 268; *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, V, 1750.

<sup>73</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 270.

Dodge's disposition, the stillness was shattered. Loud cheers and the rattle of heavy volleys of musketry rolled in from the west. Carr knew that the Confederates had finally launched their attack. Putting his spurs to his horse, Carr raced for the point of danger—Elkhorn Tavern.<sup>74</sup>

\* \* \*

While the artillery duel raged between the 1st Iowa Battery and the 17 Confederate guns, the Rebel infantry, which was massed in Cross Timber Hollow, took it easy. The Missouri officers knew it would be courting disaster to send their footsoldiers storming up the ravine so long as the Federal artillerists held their ground. One of the soldiers recalled:

The battle commenced at about half-past ten in the morning; the firing was brisk; the echo, as the booming of the guns rolled over those mountain wilds, resounded far and wide in the distant hills. The combat between the opposing batteries was fierce, and from our position we could distinctly see the red shirted Federal cannoniers [sic] as they worked with a hearty will. Our fire was well directed, raking their right and left, killing and wounding men and horses . . .<sup>75</sup>

The battery and counterbattery fire continued for well over an hour before the Confederates gained the upper hand. Following the withdrawal of the mountain howitzers, the guns almost ceased firing.

For about 20 minutes everything was very still. During this period, the distant roar of artillery could be heard to the southwest. The Confederates hearing this, knew that McCulloch's wing had found the foe.<sup>76</sup>

Colonel Little now advanced the 2d Missouri about 100 yards. This enabled him to deploy Colonel Rives' 3d Missouri on the slope to the left of the Telegraph road.<sup>77</sup>

At the same time, General Slack moved his brigade into position on the right of the 2d Missouri. Colonel Thomas H. Rosser's battalion was on the left, Major Robert S. Bevier's in the middle, and Colonel John T. Hughes' on the right. Slack's battalions covered the eastern face of

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>75</sup> Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 170.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>77</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 307.

Pea Ridge. To guard against a Union attempt to roll up his exposed right flank, which rested near the crest of the ridge, Colonel Hughes threw out about 30 of his men as skirmishers.<sup>78</sup>

Captain Reed had watched while Slack marshaled his men. Realizing that he was badly outnumbered, the captain told his bluecoats of the 24th Missouri to take cover behind trees, rocks, and stumps. Reed's soldiers waited until the Confederates who were wearing butternut pants with white blanket rolls were almost upon them.<sup>79</sup>

As soon as Slack had completed his dispositions, his troops started to feel their way forward. Suddenly, his brigade was ambushed by the soldiers of the 24th Missouri. This was their first taste of combat for a number of Slack's men. Several of the recruits panicked. Slack quickly gained control of the situation, however. In accordance with the general's orders, his men took cover and returned the bluecoats' volleys. After a few minutes hard-fighting, both sides pulled back to regroup. Among the casualties in this clash was General Slack. The general, who had been shot in the hip, was compelled to leave the field. Before doing so, Slack told Colonel Rosser to take command of the brigade.<sup>80</sup>

Not wishing to blunder into another ambush, Rosser shouted "Scouts out!" As soon as it was ascertained that the Federals had pulled back, Rosser formed the three battalions *en echelon*. He calculated that in this formation, his troops would be able to advance through the heavy timber and underbrush which covered the eastern face of Pea Ridge with less chance of again being victimized by a surprise attack.

When Rosser gave the word, the brigade moved cau-

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 312, 314.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 273, 312, 314. Slack was removed from the field to Sugar Hollow, where he was attended by his surgeon—Doctor Peter Austin. On the Saturday following the retreat of the Rebels, he was taken to a farm house belonging to Andrew Roller. Later, when fear of capture seemed imminent, Slack was taken to Moore's Mill. There, he died on March 21. There are two monuments honoring Slack, one in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he is buried, one near the site of his fatal injury.

tiously ahead. Within the hour, the 2d Battalion, 3d Illinois Cavalry assailed the right flank of Hughes' battalion. The bluecoated troopers were repulsed. Colonel Hughes reported, "They fled precipitately down the steeps of the rocky hill, leaving several of their men and horses dead on the field, and overcoats, knapsacks, caps, guns, and sabers strewn upon the ground."<sup>81</sup>

While the fighting ebbed and flowed on the eastern face of Pea Ridge, Colonel Little determined to send a "flying column" racing up the Telegraph road. Perhaps, the colonel reasoned, a lightning like thrust might take the Federals by surprise. Colonel Gates was assigned this mission.

Placing himself at the head of his regiment (The 1st Missouri Cavalry), Gates ordered his bugler to sound the charge. The crack regiment thundered forward in column by fours. On the left and the right of the road, the soldiers of the 2d and 3d Missouri advanced several hundred yards. As Gates' troopers emerged from the hollow, they were greeted by the well-aimed volleys of the 9th Iowa, delivered at point-blank range. A number of men were unhorsed. Unable to breast this fire, Gates' regiment recoiled. A number of men leaped off their horses to help cover their comrades' retreat. The 1st Missouri Cavalry retired fighting. Gates quickly rallied his men. Dismounting the remainder of his troopers, the hard-bitten colonel deployed his regiment on the left of the 3d Missouri.<sup>82</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Francis J. Herron of the 9th Iowa did not hesitate a minute. The moment the Rebels started to give way, he gave the order to counterattack. Pressing forward, the Hawkeye battle line surged into the hollow. One of the Missourians recalled:

... in a few minutes a line of enemy [the 9th Iowa] advancing with their knapsacks on and their blankets strapped to them, and coming within a hundred paces of the left of Colonel Rives' regiment [the 3rd Missouri], received a volley, from which they retreated some distance up the road. The commands of the officers, to halt, were very distinct: the men were rallied and soon

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 312, 314.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 307; Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 170-171.

returned, marching and firing by platoons, those in front breaking off to the rear after discharging their pieces and making room for the next platoon.

The regiment [the 9th Iowa] was certainly finely drilled, and executed the commands admirably; it did not, however, last long; they were advancing as they fired, and came within range of Rives' whole regiment, which soon fired a heavy volley into them and threw their ranks into confusion, which resulted in a disorderly retrograde movement; a gun was fired from our regiment [the 2d Missouri], immediately followed by a general fire from the line, the men not being able to resist the temptation of giving them a parting salute, though it was long range.<sup>83</sup>

As the 9th Iowa fell back, Colonel Little sent several combat patrols to probe Vandever's main line of resistance at the head of Cross Timber Hollow. Goaded by these thrusts, Vandever ordered his brigade to counterattack. Supported on the left by the 24th Missouri, Vandever's troops rolled forward. Fierce shouts for the Union rent the air as the Yankees drove in Little's and Rosser's skirmishers. Desperate fighting, some of it hand-to-hand, accompanied the bluecoats' advance. The 9th Iowa and the 3d Missouri met in bloody combat.<sup>84</sup>

Writing of Vandever's attack, a Confederate soldier observed:

A line extending from the [Telegraph] road some distance to the right of our regiment [the 2d Missouri] now advanced. The woods up here were rather dense, with dry leaves clinging to many of the trees, and we could hear them some time before they came in sight; when about a hundred yards distant, the opposing forces fired about the same time; the action soon became obstinate and bloody. Finding the top of the . . . [hollow] too much exposed, we fell back about fifteen steps behind it, sheltering ourselves by the crest in front, while the combat still raged with unabated fury. The . . . [Federals] finding they could not move us from the front, and being superior in numbers, began to close in upon our flanks, when a loud cheer was heard in the rear, and . . . [the 3d Missouri], coming up at double-quick, with a well directed fire, drove back the flanking forces.<sup>85</sup>

Vandever's thrust now lost its momentum. The well-directed volleys of Little's infantry and the storm of shot and shell delivered by the Missouri batteries broke the back of the attack. The tide turned. Vandever's bluecoats

<sup>83</sup> Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 170. Herron, a resident of Dubuque, had been commissioned lieutenant colonel of the 9th Iowa on September 10, 1861. He had previously served as a captain in the 1st Iowa at Wilson's Creek. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, II, 11.

<sup>84</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 260, 267, 307-308.

<sup>85</sup> Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 171.

fell back, halting frequently to fire at the oncoming Rebels. When he fell back to his original position, Vandever re-formed his line, redeploying his troops to the left of the Telegraph road.<sup>86</sup>

Colonel Carr, who witnessed this phase of the fighting, reported:

As our wounded men were being brought back by their comrades from this desperate encounter many of them would hurrah for the Union and utter expressions of joy that they had an opportunity to suffer for the cause. Colonel Vandever . . . , commanding the brigade, exhibited the utmost coolness and bravery. He was everywhere when his presence was most needed, cheering and encouraging his men, who, however, needed but little encouragement, and directing their efforts to the best advantage. His horse was hit twice. Colonel Phelps . . . had three horses shot under him and received a contusion from a shell. Both he and his regiment behaved nobly. Major [Washington F.] Geiger of the same regiment, had his horse shot under him. Major Weston . . . had three or four companies on provost-guard duty, a part of which were stationed on . . . [Pea Ridge], and did good service in protecting the flanks. Captain Hayden . . . acted with his usual coolness in superintending the operation of his guns. He had two horses killed under him. Maj. William H. Coyl, Ninth Iowa, was here wounded in the shoulder. His gallantry had been very conspicuous.<sup>87</sup>

While Vandever's soldiers were locked in their fierce struggle with Little's and Rosser's Confederates, Carr observed that Price was marshaling the State Guard preparatory to attacking Dodge's brigade. In addition, Carr saw that a dangerous gap had suddenly opened between Vandever's troops on the left and Dodge's on the right. Carr had Dodge close to the left and sealed off this opening.<sup>88</sup>

\* \* \*

General Price was in charge on the Confederate left. During the late forenoon and early afternoon, Price employed the infantry units of the State Guard to support his artillery. About noon, Price launched a small scale attack with his left flank unit, Saunders' division. This thrust was made in support of Gates' dash up the Telegraph road. Like Gates, Saunders ran into trouble. His

<sup>86</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 260, 267.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 260. A resident of Decorah, Coyle had been commissioned major in the 9th Iowa on August 30, 1861. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, II, 11.

<sup>88</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 260, 263.



footsoldiers, as they drove for the Huntsville road, were beaten back by the well-aimed volleys of the 4th Iowa.

Following this setback, Saunders regrouped his command near the head of Williams Hollow. In an effort to outflank the Federals, Price now extended his left. Saunders' greyclads, keeping a respectable distance between themselves and the Yankees, crossed the Huntsville road. Finding a favorable position east of Clemens' field, Captain Kelly had his cannoneers unlimber their five guns. Riggins' and Cearnal's Cavalry Battalions were deployed to cover Saunders' left.<sup>89</sup>

Colonel John B. Clark's division of the State Guard was posted on Saunders' right. Until early afternoon, Clark employed his soldiers to support the three guns of the St. Louis Artillery. As soon as they opened fire, the gunners of this battery concentrated their attention on David's section, 1st Iowa Battery. A spirited exchange ensued. Since the range was too great for small-arms, Colonel Clark had his men take cover in the upper reaches of Williams Hollow. Before very long, the Confederate artillerists began to be plagued by sharpshooters from the 4th Iowa. Captain Emmett MacDonald called for help. Clark accordingly deployed and threw forward several of his companies as skirmishers. A sharp fire fight developed between Clark's skirmishers and the bluecoated snipers. After a few minutes, the Iowans fell back on their main line of resistance. When Saunders' division shifted to the left, Clark recalled his outposts and followed.<sup>90</sup>

The Eighth Division, Missouri State Guard commanded by Brigadier General James S. Rains was deployed on Clark's right. The battery (Bledsoe's) which was attached to Rains' unit was armed with four guns, one of which was the famed "Sacramento." When the cannoneers of this crack organization reached the ridge south of Williams Hollow, they found all the good artillery positions

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 307, 316, 321, 329. Colonel Cearnal had been wounded in the morning's fighting. With the colonel out of action, Major D. Todd Samuels led the battalion.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

pre-empted. Several hours passed before they could put their pieces into battery. When they did, they unlimbered them on the right of the St. Louis artillery.

According to General Rains, "our battery [Bledsoe's] was brought into action . . . Here our favorite old piece 'Sacramento' found herself sustained by others, commanded by those who proved themselves during the day to be brave and gallant soldiers."<sup>91</sup> Rains credited Bledsoe's Battery, along with several others with silencing "the famous Dubuque Battery." Here, Rains is exaggerating. While Captain Hayden's 3d Iowa Battery was compelled to give ground, it was not silenced or badly crippled at this stage of the engagement.<sup>92</sup>

Brigadier General Daniel M. Frost with his Seventh and Ninth Divisions supported Guibor's, Clark's, Wade's and Tull's batteries. Although Frost's infantry was partially sheltered by the configuration of the terrain, a number of men were cut down by the deadly projectiles of the 1st and 3d Iowa Batteries. After about two hours, the Rebel guns gained the upper hand. Shortly thereafter, Frost received orders to reinforce Little's Brigade with his infantry. Quickly forming his infantry, Frost hurried his Missourians down the wood road into Cross Timber Hollow.<sup>93</sup>

\* \* \*

About 30 minutes after the repulse of Vandever's desperate thrust, Colonel Little heard a column marching up the Telegraph road. At first, the Confederates were uncertain whether the approaching soldiers were friends or enemies. The newcomers belonged to Major Lindsay's division. Satisfied that his rear was secure, General Price had sent instructions for Lindsay to move to Little's assistance. As soon as Lindsay reported to him, Little had

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 327. "Sacramento" had been captured by the Missourians in the Mexican War at the battle of Sacramento. Subsequent to that war, the gun had been presented to the State of Missouri by the Federal government. It had been placed on the bluff overlooking the Missouri River at Lexington. Captain Hiram M. Bledsoe had sent a yoke of oxen to secure the historic piece for his battery. John C. Moore, *Confederate Military History of Missouri* (Atlanta, 1899), 47.

<sup>92</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 268-269, 327.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 323, 325.

the major deploy his troops to plug the gap that had opened between the 2d and 3d Missouri.

As soon as Lindsay had carried out his instructions, Little gave the order to attack. Covered by a strong skirmish line, Little's battle line swept up Cross Timber Hollow.<sup>94</sup>

According to one of the Rebels, "Like magic the word 'charge!' ran along the line, and with a wild shout it sprang forward, driving the hostile ranks before it; rushing on, we came in sight of the little field by . . . [Elkhorn Tavern], in the edge of which a battery of six guns [the 3d Iowa] was in position, supported by a strong force of infantry [the 9th Iowa]." <sup>95</sup>

The Confederates pressed on until they reached the head of the hollow. East of the Telegraph road, the Secessionists occupied the ground from which the two Iowa batteries had been driven. Scattered about was wreckage which gave mute testimony to the fury of the shelling. The butternuts found a smashed caisson, a large quantity of ammunition, and a number of dead and wounded horses.<sup>96</sup>

As soon as the Confederates debouched from the hollow, the Union artillery roared into action. From their position on the knoll in front of the tavern, the cannoneers of the 3d Iowa Battery hampered away at the attacking Rebels with shell and canister.<sup>97</sup>

A soldier in the 2d Missouri grimly recalled, "The battery opened upon us with a sweeping fire, tearing through the limbs of the trees and scattering the rocks in the air, now filled with the contents of bursting shells. The line recoiled for an instant under the iron hail of grape and canister . . ."<sup>98</sup>

By this time, Lieutenant Madison's men had refilled their caissons. Major Bowen could see that the Union position was becoming increasingly critical. He told Madison

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 308, 322. From left to right Little's battle line was: the 1st Missouri Cavalry, the 3d Missouri Infantry, Lindsay's division, and the 2d Missouri Infantry.

<sup>95</sup> Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 171.

<sup>96</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 308.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 171.

to return to the front. The men of the "Jackass" battery emplaced their two little popguns on the eastern face of Pea Ridge, about 300 yards west of the Telegraph road. Opening fire, Madison's artillerists sent round after round of "spherical-case" crashing into the Confederate ranks.<sup>99</sup>

Besides being shelled by the Union artillery, Little's battle line was swept by the well-aimed volleys fired by the 35th Illinois, the 9th Iowa, and Phelps' regiment. Little's advance stopped. The soldiers began calling for artillery.

When Frost's column had been ordered to march to Little's support, it had been accompanied by Guibor's four gun battery. The battery took the lead as the troops started up the Telegraph road. Responding to the call for help, Captain Guibor put his battery to the gallop.

As soon as he spotted the artillery rolling up the grade, Colonel Little sent an aide to tell Captain Guibor where to emplace his guns. Unlimbering their pieces on either side of the road near the ground initially occupied by the Iowa batteries, Guibor's gunners returned the Federals' fire. At first, the Secessionists directed their attention toward Madison's mountain howitzers. The Confederates soon had the range. To save his guns, Madison abandoned his position and fell back. Neither the "Jackass" battery nor Bowen's troopers participated in any more of the day's action.<sup>100</sup>

After the withdrawal of Bowen's guns, the clash of arms at Elkhorn Tavern waned. Colonel Vandever was disappointed to see the mountain howitzers leave the field. Not only had a commanding position been abandoned, but Rosser's butternuts were exerting heavy pressure on Major Weston's soldiers who were holding Pea Ridge. Already, Weston had been compelled to call on Carr for help. A company of the 4th Iowa had been rushed to reinforce the detachments under Captain Reed which were striving to hold the Union position on top of the ridge. Now, Vandever decided, the situation was so

<sup>99</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 270.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 270, 308, 323, 325.

grave that he approached Captain Hayden with a request for help. Hayden agreed to send a detachment with one of his 6-pounders to assist Weston. This group was to put the piece in battery on the rocky southeast rim of Pea Ridge.

When the artillerists moved forward, one of Rosser's officers (Captain Samuel F. Taylor) called the colonel's "attention to the appearance of horses and the rumbling of artillery wheels ascending the hill on our extreme left." At the same time, Lieutenant Eugene Erwin pointed out that the Federals planned to emplace this gun so as to enfilade Rosser's battle line. The gun was still in motion when Rosser ordered Hughes' battalion to charge. Every member of the battalion dashed toward the approaching gun, scattering the crew, killing the team, and capturing the piece.<sup>101</sup>

Except for an occasional artillery exchange, the fighting ceased. Little's attempt to smash Carr's main line of resistance had failed. The Confederates, however, had succeeded in advancing their lines to within 300 yards of Elkhorn Tavern. Both sides made use of this hiatus to re-deploy their troops and remove the wounded. The sun was still high in the sky; the opposing commanders knew there was plenty of time left in which to win or lose the day.

Colonel Little called up his ambulances. After the hospital stewards had evacuated the Confederate wounded to the field hospital which the surgeons had established at the tanyard, they gathered up the Union casualties, "who thickly strewed the ground." No discrimination was practiced by the Confederate doctors in administering to the mangled men.<sup>102</sup>

When he inspected his units, Little found that Colonel Burbridge's 2d Missouri had been badly cut up. A staff officer was sent to ask Price for assistance. Since Price had already taken care of this matter, Little didn't have long to wait. Accompanied by his two divisions of the State

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 269, 313.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

Guard, General Frost was hastening up the hollow. Upon reaching Little's command post, Frost was directed to have his infantry relieve Burbridge's.

Moving to the front, Frost carried out his instructions. Covered by the soldiers of the State Guard, Burbridge collected his exhausted troops. After being mustered and re-formed, the 2d Missouri took position behind Frost's divisions.<sup>103</sup>

The heavy timber north of the tavern enabled the Confederates to screen these movements from the Federals. But on the right, the woods were more open. Colonel Dodge was able to watch the units of the Missouri State Guard as they shifted to the left. Guns were being emplaced on both sides of the Huntsville road; fields of fire were being cleared to the left. Several messengers were sent to warn Colonel Carr that if the Rebels were allowed to continue this movement across the Huntsville road, they would be able to turn Dodge's right flank.

Carr was satisfied that the foe was too strong for his 2,500-man division to cope with. Already, the Federals had identified a large number of Rebel units. Carr would have liked to withdraw his command. But, he reasoned:

The position which I now held would, if occupied by the enemy, have commanded our camp. We had some stores in a barn near the tavern, and I was constantly expecting re-enforcements, which I knew the general was using every effort to get up to me, and if they arrived in time we could hold the ridge, which would be as valuable to us as to the enemy, and the general sent me word repeatedly to "persevere." I therefore determined to hang on to the last extremity. Knowing that every moment saved brought my re-enforcements nearer.<sup>104</sup>

\* \* \*

About 3 p.m. one of General Curtis' aides, Captain Jason M. Adams, returned to headquarters following a visit to the Little Sugar Creek line. He informed Curtis that he he had seen Sigel and Asboth. They had told the captain that not only was there no fighting in that sector, but except for a few scouts, they had not seen any Confederates. Shortly thereafter, news reached army headquarters that the tide had turned north of Leetown; the greyclads were

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 308, 323, 325.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

said to be falling back. Satisfied that his left and center were now secure, Curtis sent a messenger to notify Carr "he would soon be reinforced." Curtis resolved "to bring up the left and center to meet the gathering hordes near Elkhorn Tavern." Accompanied by his staff, Curtis started for Little Sugar Creek.<sup>105</sup>

When Colonel Davis had marched to the Leetown area to reinforce Osterhaus' task force, he had left one regiment (the 8th Indiana) and the 1st Battery, Indiana Light Artillery to hold the earthworks which his command had thrown up overlooking Little Sugar Creek. Riding up to Colonel William P. Benton, who commanded the 8th Indiana, Curtis directed him to rush a battalion of his regiment and three guns to Elkhorn Tavern. Lieutenant Colonel David Shunk was to command this force. Benton with the right battalion of the 8th Indiana and Captain Martin Klauss' three remaining guns would continue to hold the rifle pits.<sup>106</sup>

Moving off on the double, Shunk's command turned into the Telegraph road. It was after 4 o'clock before Shunk reached Colonel Carr's Elkhorn command post. Carr told Shunk to report to Colonel Vandever. At this time, Vandever's troops were deployed west of the Telegraph road, a short distance north of the tavern. Since the fighting had died down along the front, Vandever determined to use the Indianians as his strategic reserve. The Hoosiers took position at the tavern; Klauss' artillerymen kept their three James rifles limbered up.<sup>107</sup>

From Benton's command post, Curtis rode westward. He found Sigel and Asboth with their troops on the bluff near the point where Wiston's Spring Branch flows into Little Sugar Creek. All was quiet to Sigel's front. His troops were "fresh and anxious to participate in the fight." In addition, the firing in the direction of Leetown seemed to be receding all the time. This helped verify the reports the general had been receiving indicating that the

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 200, 249-250, 252.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 252, 261, 267.

situation in the Leetown sector had changed for the better.<sup>108</sup>

Turning to Asboth, Curtis informed him that Carr's troops at Elkhorn Tavern were "hard pressed." Asboth was told to take four companies of the 2d Missouri (Union) and the four 6-pounder guns manned by the 2d Battery, Ohio Light Artillery and hasten to Carr's support. He was to march via the Telegraph road. The other section of the Ohio Battery, supported by six companies of the 2d Missouri, would be left to guard the Bentonville road.<sup>109</sup> Sigel was to hurry to Carr's assistance with the remainder of his wing, going by way of Leetown. If Colonel Davis had the situation in that area under control, Sigel would "press on to re-enforce Carr."<sup>110</sup>

Accompanied by his cannoneers and infantry, Asboth quickly gained the Telegraph road. Curtis rode with Asboth. While en route to the point of danger, Curtis rounded up a number of stragglers, whom he ordered back into action.<sup>111</sup>

\* \* \*

Colonel Dodge was a man of action. To counter the rapid Confederate build-up to his right, he determined to meet it by changing front in that direction. Recalling his troops, Dodge posted them behind the rail fence which bounded Clemens' field on the south and west. Lieutenant David's cannoneers emplaced their two guns on the Huntsville road, near the northwest corner of the field.

As soon as he had completed his redeployment, Dodge told David to open fire. The Rebels replied with eleven guns (Bledsoe's and Kelly's batteries, and the St. Louis Artillery.) Simultaneously, the greyclads of Rains', Clark's, and Saunders' divisions began to exert heavy pressure on Dodge's left, center and right.<sup>112</sup>

The situation became so critical that Dodge was com-

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 200, 212; Sigel, "The Pea Ridge Campaign," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 325.

<sup>109</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 200, 241.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.



pelled to call for help. Carr sent his only reserve, Shunk's Indianians, hustling off to Dodge's support. To plug the gap created by Dodge's shift to the right and the withdrawal of the Indianians, it became necessary for Vandever to move his brigade to the right. While Vandever was endeavoring to carry out this maneuver, Colonel Little launched another powerful drive up the Telegraph road.<sup>113</sup>

The Confederate brass, having completed their dispositions, determined to make one final effort to smash Carr's division. As soon as General Van Dorn saw that Price had formed the State Guard, he hurried to the right. Near the Telegraph road, Van Dorn found Colonel Little. He told the colonel that "Price was about to make an assault on the extreme . . . [right] of the enemy line." With this information, Van Dorn coupled an order for Little "to advance [his] . . . whole line so soon as the heavy firing on our left should give the signal of the attack under General Price." A staff officer was sent to carry this information to Colonel Rosser, whose brigade was posted on Little's right.

It was almost 5 p.m. when the sharp rattle of small-arms and the bellow of the artillery from the "left announced to" Little that the time to strike had arrived. Little had his bugler sound the charge. In an unbroken line the cheering Missouri Secessionists swept forward. Burbridge's 2d Missouri having caught its second wind raced ahead, taking position on Frost's right.

The Federals were unable to get off more than one volley before the Confederates were upon them. Vandever's brigade collapsed in the face of this powerful attack. Before the cannoneers of the 3d Iowa Battery could limber up their pieces, the Rebels closed in. Several of the artillerists were shot down while trying to hitch teams to the guns. Two of the guns were lost.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 261, 308, 313, 323, 325. Little's attacking troops were deployed from right to left: the 2d Missouri Infantry, Frost's division, Lindsay's division, the 3d Missouri Infantry and the 1st Missouri Cavalry.

Sergeant Major James W. Wooster of the 3d Illinois Cavalry volunteered to help the Iowans untangle their horses. All this time, the Iowa battery was exposed to a deadly plunging fire from Guibor's guns. While Wooster was assisting the Hawkeyes, he was cut down. A 6-pounder ball carried away part of his skull. As he fell, Wooster called to his son who was fighting alongside him, "Johnny, oh, Johnny, I must go," and expired.<sup>115</sup>

The dismounted troopers of the 1st Missouri and the grim infantrymen of the 3d Missouri pursued the fleeing bluecoats past the tavern. Vandever's troops retreated about one-half mile and took position behind a rail fence, an open field to their front.<sup>116</sup>

One of the soldiers who participated in the charge which hurled the Yankees from the area around Elkhorn Tavern wrote:

... "On to the battery" was the cry, and with a yell that rose above the roar of the battle, we closed upon the opposing ranks. The clash of arms and the din and fury of the deadly strife were now fierce and wild; the thunder of the artillery and the opening roll of the muskets of the long, fresh line of infantry, were deafening. Like a withering, scorching blast, the torrent of lead and iron poured through the surrounding smoke. Above all, "forward, Missourians," could be distinctly heard, and, in response to the ringing battle-cry, the men defiantly pressed on, delivering a deadly fire as they advanced. Then came the desperate grapple for victory: the indomitable courage of our men finally prevailed hurling back the Federal lines, and driving them from the field, capturing . . . [two guns] of the battery [the 3d Iowa] and a considerable number of prisoners.

The whole camp equipage [sic], tents and cooking utensils, the large barn filled with commissary stores, every thing that pertained to an encampment of a division of the army, except wagons, fell into our hands. The house [Elkhorn Tavern] used as a hospital, filled with the dead and wounded of the enemy, was also in our possession.<sup>117</sup>

Before leading his men to the attack, Rosser had them close to the left. Two of his three battalions were deployed on the eastern slope of Pea Ridge, one (Hughes') on top. As Rosser's brigade swept forward, it struck the units holding Vandever's left (the 24th Missouri and the 2d

<sup>115</sup> Curtis, "The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas," *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VI, No. III, 150; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 262.

<sup>116</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 261, 308.

<sup>117</sup> Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 171-172.

Battalion, 3d Illinois Cavalry). Advancing rapidly, Hughes' battalion brushed the Union troopers aside and threatened the Federals' rear. Driving the Federals before them, Rosser's greyclads forged ahead. The Confederates "rapidly advanced down the steep sides of the mountain, leaping from rock to rock over the rugged descent for some half a mile, driving the Federals like a tempest before them."<sup>118</sup>

Despite this setback, Colonel Carr was proud of the way Vandever's troops had fought against heavy odds. He wrote in his "After Action Report":

My troops fought with most heroic courage and devotion, officers exposing themselves freely, cheering and encouraging their men, but it was impossible to withstand such overpowering numbers, and the men retreated . . .

Lieut. Col. F. J. Herron . . . had his horse shot under him, was wounded, and taken prisoner. He had commanded his regiment during the entire engagement, and his courage and conduct won the admiration of all, and will add to the laurels he gained at the battle of Wilson's Creek.<sup>119</sup>

Fortunately for the Federals, help was at hand. General Asboth had ridden ahead of his column. At the time of his arrival near Elkhorn Tavern, Asboth found Vandever's bluecoats retiring in the face of the sledge-hammer like blows delivered by Little and Rosser. Already, the Confederates were in control of the tavern and the woods beyond. To make matters worse, the Rebel skirmishers had gained the open fields on either side of the Telegraph road, southwest of the tavern.

The situation was so critical that Asboth realized it would be suicidal to wait for Sigel. Word was sent for Lieutenant William B. Chapman of the 2d Ohio Battery to bring his four guns to the front. Thundering up the Telegraph road, the Ohioans threw their field pieces into battery on the left of the road, one-half mile southwest of Elkhorn Tavern. On the opposite side of the road, the gunners of the 3d Iowa Battery had emplaced their three remaining guns. Hardly had the trails hit the ground,

<sup>118</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 313, 315.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 261. Many years later, a grateful government awarded Herron and Carr the coveted Medal of Honor for their gallantry at Pea Ridge.

before the cannoneers were hammering the oncoming Rebels with shot and shell. Colonel Frederick Schaefer supported the 2d Ohio Battery with his four companies of infantry. The fire of these seven guns helped check the Missouri Secessionists' advance. Carr was given time to re-form Vandever's battered brigade and establish his new main line of resistance.<sup>120</sup>

Meanwhile, the State Guard was exerting tremendous pressure on Colonel Dodge's brigade. General Price, on reconnoitering Dodge's line, saw that the Yankees had strengthened their position behind Clemens' field by throwing up field fortifications of rails and logs. Four batteries (Bledsoe's, Clark's, Kelly's, and the St. Louis) were unlimbered to support the attack of the three divisions of the State Guard which Price had massed.

When Price gave the word, Saunders', Clark's, and Rains' divisions moved forward. Despite a murderous fire, the Confederates slowly gained ground. The Rebel artillerists advanced their guns in conjunction with the infantry. The guns would be manhandled forward several yards, placed in battery, and fired. This procedure was repeated until they reached Clemens' field. From here, the Rebel gunners raked Dodge's infantry with a deadly point-blank fire.<sup>121</sup>

Since they were short of ammunition, a number of the Rebel cannoneers charged their pieces with "wagon nuts, pieces of chain, gravel and various other kinds of projectiles." A number of the Federals were hit by these "unusual missiles." Although Colonel Dodge's overcoat was riddled, he escaped serious injury.<sup>122</sup>

About this time, Dodge received bad news. Lieutenant David informed the colonel that his gunners had fired up all the ammunition in their limbers and caissons. Shaking his head sadly, Dodge sent David's section to the rear.<sup>123</sup>

Meanwhile, Colonel Shunk's command had reported to

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 321, 327.

<sup>122</sup> Curtis, "The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas," *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VI, No. III, 152.

<sup>123</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 263.

Dodge. Captain Klauss' cannoneers were directed to emplace their three James rifles on the left of the 35th Illinois. After opening fire, the Hoosiers sent several rounds crashing into the oncoming Confederate battle lines. The collapse of Vandever's brigade left the Indiana artillerists in a precarious position. Little's left flank regiment, the 1st Missouri Cavalry swung sharply to the left. Raked by a deadly enfilading fire, Klauss' gunners brought up their teams, hitched them to the guns, and beat a hurried retreat.<sup>124</sup>

Now to make matters worse, Dodge saw that Price's left flank unit (Saunders' division) was about to envelop his right. Dodge rushed Shunk's battalion to the point of danger. Shunk's Hoosiers arrived in the nick of time. Saunders' greyclads were hurled back.

Dodge received bad news from his left. After securing possession of the area around Elkhorn Tavern, the Confederates had brought up Guibor's battery. Little had the artillerists face several of their pieces to the east. When Captain Guibor gave the word, the guns roared into action. Shot and shell from the battery swept through the line held by the 35th Illinois. Unable to hold its ground in the face of this terrible enfilading fire, the Illinois regiment fell back.

Dodge's fighting blood was up. Although he had lost one-third of his men, he ordered Colonel Chandler to rally his men. Quickly re-forming his soldiers, Chandler launched a savage counterattack. Chandler hoped that his men would be able to capture and spike Guibor's guns. The Union sortie was repulsed; Chandler and 45 of his men were captured.<sup>125</sup>

During this fighting:

A German soldier of the 35th Illinois met with two singular and narrow escapes . . . . He wore ear-rings, and a bullet cut one of them in two and passed into the shoulder of his Second Lieutenant, the broken fragments of the ring still remaining in the ear. Ten minutes later, during a lull in the fight, and while the soldier was

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 261, 263.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-264; Dodge, "Personal Biography," I, 49-52. Sigel, "The Pea Ridge Campaign," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, I, 323.

relating his escape, a stray musket ball carried away the other earring, slightly injuring the skin of the ear.<sup>126</sup>

All this time, Dodge had been so busy he did not know that Vandever's brigade had been driven from its position at Elkhorn Tavern. The fire of Guibor's Battery led Dodge to suspect that something was amiss. He told Adjutant Williamson to ride to the tavern and see what was the trouble. Before Williamson had gone very far, he rode into a whole host of Rebels. The Confederates called for the adjutant to surrender. He refused. Putting his spurs to his horse, Williamson succeeded in escaping. The adjutant headed for Dodge's command post with the bad news that Vandever had retreated.

Because the soldiers of the 4th Iowa had shot up most of their ammunition, Dodge had no alternative but to retire. Covered by a strong line of skirmishers, the blue-coats started to pull back. As soon as the Federals' fire slackened, the soldiers of the State Guard stormed across Clemens' field. Dodge halted his men long enough to give the Rebels several well-aimed volleys. The Confederate officers called for artillery. During this brief pause, Dodge succeeded in disengaging his command. Dodge fell back about one-half mile, and re-formed his troops behind Samuel Ruddick's field.<sup>127</sup>

\* \* \*

5

#### One of Curtis' staff officers recalled:

When Colonel Dodge was forced back, he left Charles Baker, a hospital nurse, at a secluded house [Clemens'] filled with Union wounded. The rebels discovered Baker observing their motions from behind a chimney. He was taken prisoner, placed in the front rank and marched towards the Union lines, fully exposed to their fire. The enemy was compelled . . . [to retire briefly], when Baker made his escape to the brush, but he was soon retaken and confronted with Price. The latter desired to know who was that man in the black coat who commanded the Federals opposed to him. When told that it was Colonel Dodge of the 4th Iowa Infan-

<sup>126</sup> Curtis, "The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas," *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VI, No. III, 153.

<sup>127</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 264, 319, 327; Dodge, "Personal Biography," I, 49-52.

try, he said, "Give my compliments to him and say to him that he has given me the best fight I ever witnessed."<sup>128</sup>

\* \* \*

After about one-half hour, General Asboth observed that the fire of Chapman's guns had compelled Rosser's brigade to fall back and abandon the wooded pasture west of Telegraph road. Asboth called for Colonel Schaefer to deploy his men as skirmishers to the left and to the right of Chapman's four guns. Pushing forward, the Missouri Unionists mopped up the woods and reached a rail fence within several hundred yards of the tavern. Here, they took cover. Asboth now waved the artillery forward. Limbering up their pieces, the Ohioans advanced up the Telegraph road.<sup>129</sup>

As soon as Dodge's troops had crossed Samuel Rudick's field, General Curtis rode up. Sighting Dodge, Curtis asked what was the trouble?

Dodge told the general that he was "out of ammunition and had held the position two hours after everything else had left."

Curtis replied, directing Dodge to lead his soldiers back into the fight. Wheeling his horse about, Curtis remarked that he would ride to the left and see how Asboth's counterattack was progressing.

Dodge did not think too highly of the course of action proposed by his fellow Iowan. He cautioned, "General, it (retaking Elkhorn) cannot be done tonight. You have lost that point and the enemy occupies it with several batteries and all their forces." Curtis had already made up his mind however.<sup>130</sup>

By this time, the cannoneers of the 2d Ohio Battery had emplaced their four 6-pounders on the left of the Telegraph road. A fierce duel with the guns manned by Guibor's, Wade's, and the St. Louis Artillery ensued. The

<sup>128</sup> Curtis, "The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas," *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VI, No. III, 152. Charles A. Baker of Guthrie Center had enlisted in Company C, 4th Iowa as a corporal on June 26, 1861. *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, I, 546.

<sup>129</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 241.

<sup>130</sup> Dodge, "Personal Biography," I, 49-52.

three Confederate units had emplaced their pieces near the tavern. It was starting to get dark when the gun captains informed Asboth (The general had been wounded in the arm, but he refused to leave the field.) that they were running short of ammunition. At this, Asboth passed the word to retire. Screened by Schaefer's four companies of Missourians, the Ohio artillerists fell back to their first position.<sup>131</sup>

Despite his belief that it was too late in the day to recover the lost ground, Dodge sent the 4th Iowa forward. Since most of the soldiers had used up all their cartridges, the Hawkeyes advanced with fixed bayonets. Pressing forward, the 4th Iowa swept across Samuel Ruddick's field. A few Confederate scouts retired before their advance.

As soon as Curtis learned that Asboth had been unable to hold his advance position, he sent word for Dodge to recall his soldiers. It was almost dark when the staff officer delivered this message to the hard-fighting brigade commander. Suspending the counterattack, Dodge collected his scattered units and returned to his camp. After his troops had eaten, cleaned their guns, and drawn ammunition, Dodge led them back to the front.<sup>132</sup>

It was fortunate for the Federals that night was at hand, because all the batteries and most of the infantry were out of ammunition. General Curtis writing of the failure of his late afternoon counterstroke reported:

The infantry, however, stood firm or fell back in good order, and the batteries were soon restored, but the caissons got quite out of reach. The artillery firing was renewed, however, and kept up till dark, the enemy firing the last shot, for I could not find another cartridge to give them a final round; even the little howitzers responded, "No cartridges."

As soon as the Confederate guns fell silent, Curtis detailed men and hurried them off to the camp to bring up the caissons and the ordnance wagons loaded with small-arms ammunition. At the same time, the General inspected and approved Carr's new main line of resistance.

<sup>131</sup> O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 241.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 264; Dodge, "Personal Biography," I, 49-52.



The Federal infantry lay in the edge of the timber, with fields to their front. A detachment from each unit was sent to the rear to fetch rations and water for their comrades. According to Curtis, "thus without a murmur these weary soldiers lay and many of them slept within a few yards of the foe, with their dead and wounded comrades scattered around them. Darkness, silence, and fatigue soon secured to the weary broken slumbers and gloomy repose."<sup>133</sup>

Although Colonel Carr's command had been driven back, it had accomplished its mission. Outnumbered more than two to one, Carr's troops, of whom over one-third were Iowans, had grimly clung to their position until the day was almost spent. When they were finally forced to yield, it was too late for the Confederates to exploit their success. Even when the troops finally fell back, Curtis ordered a counterattack. If Carr's division had not been able to hold Price at bay for most of the day, the jaws of the Confederate converging attack undoubtedly would have closed and crushed the Army of the Southwest. A fearful price, however, had been paid by Carr's command. Out of the 2,463 officers and men engaged, Carr reported the loss of 663, of which 97 were killed, 488 wounded and 78 missing.<sup>134</sup>

Unlike the Union leaders, General Van Dorn and his officers were disappointed by the approach of darkness. After many hours of hard fighting, they had finally seized a key position. Now, night had put a stop to the fighting, before they could exploit their success. Orders were issued for the troops to bivouac on the ground they had won.

Colonel Little's troops followed Asboth's column a short distance as it retreated down the Telegraph road. Little halted his men near Ruddick's field. As soon as he had redeployed his units, Little advanced them to the fence. Here, they remained for the night.

<sup>133</sup> *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. VIII, 201.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

Details were sent to the rear to see what they could find in the way of food. One of the soldiers reported that these detachments visited the captured commissary store houses and the camp of the 24th Missouri (Union):

Cooking utensils and all the conveniences were at hand, just as they had been left after the usual preparation of a meal. The large building [the Elkhorn Tavern barn] was entered where the bulk of the stores was deposited; barrels of flour were opened and appropriated, fine bacon hams were brought into requisition, and good coffee was added. One end of the building was found to contain a large amount of sutlers' stores, such as oysters, sardines, lobsters, crackers and cheese, canned fruits, preserves, pickles and wine; hungry as we were after our long fast, we were now prepared to do justice to this glorious feast.

The men were jovial and jubilant over their good fortune; the strong and aromatic coffee gave forth its exhilarating [sic] and recuperative power; the rich viands delighted the palates of our grateful boys, renewing their worn frames and exhausted strength, and the nice delicacies crowned the whole with a luxurious finish that even an epicure would have enjoyed.

One item which the Confederates left undisturbed was the desiccated vegetables. Either the Southerners did not know how to prepare the desiccated vegetables, or they had already had a chance to find out how vile they were. After eating, the Missourians had a good time opening and reading the large mail which they had captured at the tavern.<sup>135</sup>

Outposts were established and manned, camp fires were kindled, and the Rebels retired for the night. Morale in Price's wing was high. Despite heavy losses, the Missourians had captured a key position. The soldiers look forward with confidence to a resumption of the fighting in the morning.

<sup>135</sup> Anderson, *History of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade*, 171; O. R., Series I, Vol. VIII, 284, 309; Curtis, "The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas," *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VI, No. III, 144.

*To be continued in the next issue.*

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.